

# Poster Design - Workbook

This workbook turns the Poster Design course into three finished posters and the files to ship them. Each section pairs with a course module and mixes guided exercises, fill-in worksheets, and checklists so you end up with real artwork - a thumbnail set, a working grid, a type scale, a tested palette, and press-ready and screen exports - not just notes. Work through it with your design software open, a brief in front of you, and the two-distance test always in mind: does it read at three meters, and does it reward a look at thirty centimeters. The value is in the posters you build and the specs you write down so a printer can run them and a screen can show them.

## What a Poster Has to Do: Format, Distance, and the Single Idea

Lock the format and resolution, distill the brief to one idea, and find the composition through thumbnails before you open the software.

### Worksheet: Brief and Single-Idea Worksheet

Complete this before designing anything. Pick a real or invented brief (an event, a film, a cause, a product launch) and force it down to one message and one visual concept.  
The one thing a viewer must take away (one sentence)

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Audience and where it lives (wall / corridor / phone / billboard)

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Information hierarchy ranked (title / date / venue / body / logos / fine print)

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Required content you cannot cut (legal lines, sponsor logos, ticket URL)

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Emotional register (urgent / calm / playful / austere / premium)

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Chosen single visual concept (type-led / image-led / graphic-system)

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### Worksheet: Format and Resolution Spec

Define the canvas for each poster before you build the document. Confirm the unknowns (required dpi at size, exact bleed) with your chosen printer or display vendor.  
Final size and orientation (e.g. A2 420 x 594 mm portrait, or 1080 x 1920 px)

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Medium (large-format print / art print / digital screen / social)

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Color mode (CMYK for print, sRGB/RGB for screen)

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Bleed and safety margin for print (e.g. 3 mm bleed, 5 mm safety)

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Required resolution at final size (e.g. 300 dpi art print / ~150 dpi A1 / lower large-format)

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Software chosen (Illustrator / InDesign / Photoshop / Affinity) and why

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### Exercise: Twelve-Thumbnail Sprint and the Two-Distance Test

By hand, draw 12 tiny thumbnails (a few cm tall) for your brief - sketch the same idea three clearly different ways (type-led, image-led, graphic-system) and vary the rest. Mark only the focal point, title block, and information masses; no real type, no color. Pick the strongest two or three, then run the two-distance test on each.

- Which of your three directions (type-led, image-led, graphic) produced the strongest far read as a thumbnail?
  - At thumbnail size, is the single message and focal point instantly clear, or does it turn to grey mush?
  - Did any thumbnail try to say too much - and what would you cut to strengthen the one idea?
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### Checklist: Pre-Design Readiness Checklist

- Single message stated in one sentence
  - Information hierarchy ranked from must-read-first to fine print
  - Final size, orientation, and medium decided
  - Document built at trim size with correct color mode, bleed, and safety margin
  - Required resolution at final size confirmed with the printer or vendor
  - At least one strong thumbnail passes the far-read (thumbnail) test
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## Composition: Grids, Hierarchy, and Negative Space

Build the underlying structure - a working grid, one dominant focal point, balanced weight, and confident empty space.

### Exercise: Build a Working Grid

In InDesign or Illustrator, set up a grid for your chosen poster: margins scaled to the format, a column count matched to your content, gutters, and a baseline grid tied to your body type's leading. Put the grid on its own locked layer and compose your masses against it. Then deliberately plan one grid break for an accent.

- How many columns did you choose, and why does that count fit your content?
  - Are your margins generous enough to feel confident, or tight enough to feel busy - which did you intend?
  - What single element will break the grid for tension, and is the rest of the layout calm enough to make the break read as intentional?
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### Exercise: Focal Point and Hierarchy Pass

Establish one unmistakable focal point that wins the far read (usually the title or hero image), then rank everything else into a secondary and tertiary level using scale, contrast, color, position, and weight. Track where your own eye lands first, second, and third on the thumbnail.

- What is your single focal point, and is it dominant by scale and contrast, with no element competing to be biggest?
- Does your eye actually travel primary, then secondary, then tertiary - and if not, what scale or contrast change fixes it?
- Which hierarchy tools did you use (scale / contrast / color / isolation / weight), and is any level too close to

the one above it?

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## Worksheet: Composition and Balance Plan

Plan the arrangement of weight on the page before refining. Decide the balance type and where the key elements sit relative to thirds and the optical center.

Balance type chosen (symmetrical / asymmetrical) and the feeling it gives

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Focal point position (which third or the optical center)

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What counterweights the focal point (secondary elements / negative space)

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Planned areas of deliberate negative space

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One element to remove because it does not earn its place

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Far-read check: at thumbnail size, does the weight feel distributed, not lopsided or sinking?

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## Checklist: Composition Checklist

- Grid built on its own locked layer with margins, columns, gutters, and a baseline
- One dominant focal point that wins the far read
- Clear three-level hierarchy (primary / secondary / tertiary)
- Key elements placed on thirds or the optical center, not dead center by default
- Negative space used deliberately to let the focal point breathe
- At least one element removed to strengthen the composition

## Type and Color: The Poster's Voice

Give the poster a voice - a deliberate type scale and pairing, a limited tested color system, and integrated imagery.

### Exercise: Set a Type Scale and Hierarchy

Choose a modular scale ratio (e.g. 1.25 major third, 1.333 perfect fourth, or 1.618 golden ratio) and generate your size set from a body size. Set the title at display size with the contrast exaggerated for a poster, tune tracking and leading on the big type, and limit yourself to one or two typefaces (or weights of one family).

- Which ratio did you use, and what are your three or four resulting sizes (body, secondary, title)?
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- Is the jump from title to body dramatic enough for a poster, or is there a muddy middle where sizes look almost equal?
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- How many typefaces did you use, and if two, do they contrast clearly in role rather than looking similar-but-different?
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### Exercise: Build and Stress-Test the Palette

Choose a harmony (monochromatic / analogous / complementary / split-complementary / triadic) and build a limited two-to-three color palette in Adobe Color or Colors, assigning each color a job (dominant / support / accent). Then desaturate the whole poster to grayscale to judge value contrast, and check the text contrast ratio with a tool like the WebAIM contrast checker.

- Which harmony did you choose, and what job does each color do (dominant / support / accent)?
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- In grayscale, does the type still stand out clearly, or does it vanish because the value contrast is too low?

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- What contrast ratio did your body and title text hit against their backgrounds (target 4.5:1 normal, 3:1 large)?
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### Worksheet: Type and Color Spec

Record the type and color decisions so they stay consistent across all three posters and into the print spec. Typeface(s) and weights, with the role of each (title / body / detail)

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Type scale ratio and the size set (body / secondary / title)

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Color harmony chosen

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Each color with its job and value (dominant / support / accent; light/mid/dark)

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Grayscale value-contrast result (type holds / fails)

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Text contrast ratios (normal text and large text)

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### Checklist: Type, Color, and Image Checklist

- One or two typefaces only, with clearly contrasting roles
- Deliberate type scale; title contrast exaggerated for the far read
- Title tracking and leading tuned at display size; problem pairs kerned
- Limited palette (2-3 colors) with a chosen harmony and defined jobs
- Value contrast verified in grayscale; text contrast ratio checked
- Any image treated to fit the palette and integrated with the type, not stuck on top

### Style, Production, and Delivery

Choose a tradition on purpose, prepare a press-ready print file, and export and present the poster for screen.

#### Exercise: Choose a Movement and Build a Reference Board

Pick a poster tradition that reinforces your message (Swiss/International Typographic, Bauhaus/Constructivist, Art Nouveau, psychedelic/pop, punk/DIY, or contemporary Neo-Swiss). Collect 8 to 15 real reference posters in that direction, name what makes each work, and extract the rules you will follow plus the one or two you will deliberately break.

- Which movement did you choose, and how does it reinforce this specific message and audience?

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  - What three rules from your references will you follow (grid / palette / type / space / texture)?

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  - Which one rule will you deliberately break for a point of view, while keeping the execution coherent?
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### Worksheet: Print Production Spec Sheet

Fill this out so a printer could run your poster without emailing questions. Confirm the unknowns (process, exact bleed, rich-black recipe) with your chosen printer.

Final trim size and orientation (e.g. A2 portrait)

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Stock and finish (paper weight gsm, matte/gloss, lamination)

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Bleed and safety margin (e.g. 3 mm bleed, 5 mm safety)

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Color: CMYK build, plus any Pantone spot ink named exactly (e.g. PANTONE 485 C)

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Rich-black recipe for large dark areas (e.g. C40 M30 Y30 K100 - confirm with printer)

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Resolution at final size and deliverable format (PDF/X-1a or X-4 with bleed)

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### Worksheet: Digital Export and Presentation Plan

Plan the screen exports and the mockups that will present each poster. Tailor the views to where it lives and who approves it.

Screen color space and target (sRGB; e.g. 1080 x 1350 px Instagram / 1080 x 1920 px display)

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Export format (PNG for flat/type, JPEG for photographic, 2x for high-density screens)

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Small-screen legibility check (title and key info readable as a feed thumbnail?)

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Mockup method and scenes (smart-object template / framed wall / city hoarding / in hand)

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Far-read and near-read views to present (full hero + detail crop)

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One or two sentences of rationale (idea, audience, why type/color/style serve it)

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### Checklist: Final Pre-Flight and Delivery Checklist

- Print file is CMYK with any spot colors correctly named
- Full bleed on all edges; critical content inside the safety margin
- Fonts outlined or embedded; placed images at the required resolution
- Black type set to overprint; white knocks out; pre-flight run clean
- Exported press-ready PDF (PDF/X-1a or X-4) with bleed
- Separate sRGB screen export at exact pixel size, legible as a thumbnail
- Poster shown in at least one in-context mockup, with a far-read and near-read view

### Your Action Plan

1. Pick a brief and distill it to one message and one visual concept in a single sentence.
2. Lock the format, orientation, medium, color mode, bleed, and required resolution before building the document.
3. Sketch 12 hand thumbnails across three directions and choose the strongest by the far-read (thumbnail) test.
4. Build a working grid - margins, columns, gutters, baseline - on its own locked layer and compose the masses against it.
5. Establish one dominant focal point and a clear three-level hierarchy using scale, contrast, color, and isolation.
6. Set a deliberate type scale and pairing, then tune tracking and leading on the title for the far read.
7. Build a limited 2-3 color palette on a chosen harmony and verify legibility in grayscale and by

contrast ratio.

8. Choose a poster tradition, build a reference board, and execute the design coherently within it.
9. Prepare the press-ready file - CMYK, bleed, safety margin, outlined fonts, full-resolution images - and export a PDF/X.
10. Export a separate sRGB screen file at exact pixel size, place the poster in a context mockup, and present a far-read and near-read view.











